Fifth Pay Commission's criticism of new Railway Zones

*109. SHRI JALALUDIN ANSARI:
SHRI N. GIRIPRASAD:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Fifth Central Pay Commission has criticised the creation of six new railway zones, as was announced in the last railway budget and recommended to halt the process forthwith; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN): (a) and (b) The Fifth Central Pay Commission has commented upon the rationale for setting up of six new zones and has recommended that their creation is likely to increase the cost of administration substantially without commensurated benefits. It has recommended that the Government halt the process even at this stage and proceed slowly in rationalising Zones after obtaining expert advice.

In view of the recommendations of an expert body like Railways Reforms Committee and subsequent changes that have taken place in the last twelve years especially extensive gauge conversions under Project Unigauge and coming up of Konkan Railway, increase in traffic volumes/patterns, the Government have decided to set up six new zones with headquarters at Bhubaneswar, Allahabad, Hajipur, Jaipur, Bangalore and Jabalpur. The inaugural functions for these six new Zonal Ofices have also been held.

The formation of new Zones is expected to provide relief to the heavily worked Zones, imporove accessibility and enable the administration to have an effective control over the compact Zones leading to better services and customer satisfaction.

Minimum Support Price for Copra

*110. SHRI M.A. BABY: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Govemment have decided to decrease the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Copra;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the MSP recommended by the Agricultural Costs and Prices Commission;

(d) whether the Commission has given any recommendation for the improvement of coconut cultivation; and

(e) if so, the details thereof and the response of the Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA): (a) to (c) No, Sir, The Government has fixed the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of 'Milling' Copra at Rs. 2700 per quintal and of 'Ball' copra at Rs. 2925 per quintal for the 1997 season. This marks and increase of Rs. 200 per quintal for each veriety over the MSPs fixed for the 1996 season. The MSPs fixed for the 1997 season are the same as those recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).

(a) and (e) The C.A.C.P. has not given any specific recommendation for the improvement of coconut cultivation as such. However, it has made the following recommendations which may help improve the cultivation of copra:

(i) the public agencies like KERAFED be authorised to also undertake commercial purchases of copra at an adequate scale;

(ii) in the case of 'Milling' copra in Kerala, the period for the purpose of price support operations and open market purchases by the public agencies be specified as January to June when prices of copra generally remain depressed;